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CHAPTER XVII

A TRIO OF MYSTERIES

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IN one of the Nosu books I was trying to read, with the aid of a wizard who knew no Chinese, I came across a curious diagram, which looked like an inverted evolution chart. It is supposed to represent the course of a flowing river, and at the side gives the stations where various persons and animals may drink.

At the source of the stream, where the water is purest and uncontaminated by the overlords, the Earth Eyes have their drinking station. Next in social rank to them come the Black Bloods, followed by the White Nosu, the ordinary tenants of the Earth Eyes or Black Bloods. All this is plain sailing and easily understood. But the surprise of the chart comes in the next step. Here there is a drinking station assigned to the Lama, or the Oo-Chi La-ma, to give the name in full. I asked my weird pundit who were the Lama, who ranked below the White Nosu and above the slaves. He informed me that these were the Tibetans, who were a degenerate branch of the Nosu. This statement was one of the most remarkable I had as yet heard from any of these people. More than once have I heard the Nosu claim that the Tibetans are Nosu, and there is a tomb of a wealthy member of that race who lived and died in Chinese territory where such a claim is cut on the stones. Some of the wizards at times wear a head-dress similar to the ceremonial hats worn by some of the Tibetan Lamas. Not long after I

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had talked this matter over with the wizard pundit and other Nosu friends a Tibetan Christian came to my home with a missionary who has spent years on the borders of Tibet. I got one of the independent Nosu from north of the Yangtse and this Tibetan together, and tried hard to see if there was anything in common in their speech. We had no success whatever in the attempt. Neither could understand anything the other said, and at last the two gave up the attempt and agreed that they had nothing in common. This Tibetan came from the neighbourhood of Lhassa. With Tibetans who live in Eastern Tibet, where these last years there has been such a struggle with China, a fellow-missionary who is an authority on that borderland and its peoples assured me the case is very different. He told me that there was a good bit of similarity between the speech of these Tibetans and the Nosu. It seems probable that the claim made by the Nosu is correct. If so, in these Nosu one is in touch with one of the very early races of Asia. There is, however, one problem in connection with this question which is not easily solved. Buddhism is all-powerful throughout Tibet. In Nosuland I found no trace of it at all. There are no temples, no priests, no idols, and polyandry, that eccentric custom of the great Lama tablelands, is unknown among the brave hill tribes. There are customs almost as revolting, such, for instance, as a father claiming his widowed daughter-in-law, but one woman having several husbands is quite unknown.

Then again the Tibetan written language and literature are very different to that of the Nosu. This, however, may not be a certain proof of the dissimilarity of origin in the two peoples, for the Tibetian written language was not originally their own.

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173 At any rate there is the statement in one of the Nosu books that the Lamas rank as part of the Nosu people taking a quite low position in the social scale.

773 From some of the hills of Nosuland can be seen the great white snow-covered ranges of Tibet, those white hills which in clear weather can be seen immense distances, and when once seen are never forgotten. As the snow on the tops of these distant mountains never melts away, the Nosu think that it cannot be snow. To them these mountains are magic mountains, where dwell a large number of white maidens. They say that no bride can ever cross those white ridges. 000 Whenever a bride appears the white maidens come out and bewitch her away. Perhaps some such story as this has prevented the Chinese officials and their retinue, who used to go, as representatives of the Chinese Government, into Tibet, from taking their wives with them. At any rate, while in Tibet, native wives were provided for them all. These women do not seem to have objected to the temporary union. One of the officers who was in Tibet during the late Chinese fighting (1918) told me that when one town fell to the Chinese troops the commander received, as his share of the booty, twelve such Tibetan women.

Our stay at the See-tieh farmstead came to an end at last. When we left we felt we were leaving friends behind, whom we promised to visit again before long. One of Ah-pooh's sons was a fine, well-built young man named Vri-ntee. He was recognised as the leading man in the whole district, and was looked up to by everybody. Because he declared himself the friend of the Englishman who had come into his land no one in that district dared to turn traitor to us. The constant friendship of these people was largely owing to the attitude

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by burning pork fat in shallow dishes, with wicks of twisted cotton. The dishes were first put on the fire to melt the lard, and after that the lamps burned fairly well.

It is quite interesting to notice the different kinds of oil which are burnt on the hills of Western China. In Chinese homes, on the gods' altar, which always faces the central door of the chief apartment, the shades of eve see the lighting up of a small lamp on a high stand in which is burnt mustard oil. This is supposed to be the purest oil, and only this is burnt in front of the gods. Any other oil is supposed to be an insult to the deities of the Chinese Pantheon. Years ago this was the most expensive oil, and was reserved, as a rule, for cooking purposes or for the ancestral spirits and the gods. There is very little smoke with the mustard oil, and the flame burns clear. For ordinary household purposes the oil used was that of the tung-tree, the tree that produces the finest varnish in the world. Formerly this oil was only half the price of the mustard oil, but the large foreign demand for the varnish has almost levelled the prices of the two oils. In winter the varnish oil congeals, and then it looks very much like lard. There is a story that one of the great armies of the Taipings was marching victoriously through the southern districts bordering the Yangtse, when they came to a village near to Mr Long's house. Here they found stored a number of tubs of the varnish oil. Many of the soldiers mistook the congealed oil for pork fat, and all through the camp that night the evening meal was cooked with the welcome fat. If there is anything a Chinaman likes, it is pork and pork fat. Now you cannot eat this varnish oil without getting very much upset, and that was the result that overtook the army of the Taiping rebels. Very much

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weakened, the army continued its march, and coming later on to the borders of Nosuland, a large band of the hillmen, under the leadership of a famous chief, lay in ambush for them, and in one of the defiles, practically annihilated this branch of the great rebel forces. That wandering army was never again much trouble to the Manchu dynasty. I do not know whether the Manchus were grateful to the Nosu for this signal service. And I have never heard that the famous chief of the hillmen was rewarded. Possibly the large booty which fell to the share of the aboriginals was considered by them sufficient reward for all they had done. After all, it was merely another successful raid they had made, and it was an accident that they had rendered a service to their hereditary enemies.

A number of other oils are also used for lighting purposes. Nearly all of these are now giving place to petroleum, of which large quantities are sold all over the country. In the district where I am living this foreign oil costs about threepence a pound, double the price of the native oils. As we sat around the fire one of the men showed me how to put up the Nosu poke to the left of my hair, and just this simple little thing pleased them very much. Just what the origin of the head horns is one does not know. In Nosuland it is the men who wear the horns. South of the Yangtse, among another tribe, the Flowery Miao, it is the women who wear the exalted horn, as a sign of motherhood. Very occasionally a Miao man may be seen with the horn, but this is rare.

After a few of us had sung some hymns in Nosu and Chinese, one of the men got up and went outside that he might sing to us. His theme was an improvised one and

is not good. Scientifically, however, the change does not seem quite satisfactory, and practically, it is also very inconvenient. There are many kinds of frontier tribes living in the various southwestern provinces, and if all were uniformly designated as border people, there would be no means of differentiating them and confusion would ensue. Particularly specialists who are doing scholarly research in ethnology, linguistics, and related fields find this solution quite contrary to scientific principle. Furthermore, these frontier tribes, not being familiar with the Chinese language, are quite puzzled by the words "border people"/93/ and may even misinterpret them as some form of insult, in which case the intended remedy would defeat its own purpose. Upon investigation we find that the Lolo call themselves Nosu and give the name No to the Heh-I. In order to arrive at an appropriate name, why can't we transliterate these words into Chinese, which would not only simplify the matter but would also eliminate all possibility of misunderstanding or suspicion of intentional insult?

The Lolo belong to the Tibetan-Burmese group of people. The relationship is traceable in spite of the difference in racial types. The Lolo are in a medial position, being smaller than the Tibetans and taller than the Burmese. All the words in the Lolo language are made up of several syllables with the stress falling on the last. Their sentences have inverted word order (the verb is placed after the noun; e.g., they say "dinner to have" for "to have dinner"). Their language thus resembles the Tibetan and the Japanese and differs from the Chinese, indicating that the Lolo and Tibetan tribes might have sprung from the same stock. Evidence of the Lolo's relationship to the Burmese may be found in one of the prevalent legends. Both the Burmese and the Lolo claim, with pride, to be the descendants of Meng Huo. The purpose of "The Eight Captures of K'ung-ming"--one of the good plays in the Burmese theater--is to counteract the plot found in the Manchus' "The Seven Captures of Meng Huo." /At the time of the Three Kingdoms (third century A.D.), Chu-ko Liang, or Chu-ko K'ung-ming, scholar-general of the Shu Han Kingdom, sent a Chinese army to the southwest to fight Meng Huo, chief of the native tribes there. According to the Chinese story, Meng Huo was captured seven times before he finally surrendered./ For similar reasons all the I claim to be legitimate descendants of Meng Huo and consider their lineage a great honor. Meng Huo was indeed a native of the southwestern border region and might very well have been an ancestor of these tribes. But the Lolo and the Burmese tribes originated long before the period of

he Three Kingdoms, and the majority of them obviously could not 173 ●
ave been the descendants of Meng Huo. Perhaps this claim is merely
n expression of hero worship--in the same way as the Chinese consider
iemselves descendants of Huang Ti /The Yellow Emperor/--with no
irther implications.

There is another myth among the Lolo concerning the origin
f their tribes. It is said that Heaven had three sons: the eldest was
n I, the second a Fan (Tibetan), and the youngest a Han. Heaven,
avoring the youngest son, gave him the plains; he gave the hilly re-
ions to the second son; and the high mountains and barren lands he
eft for the eldest (the I).

Of the native tribes in the southwestern part of our country, the 131
olo are among the most numerous. They are distributed in the pro-
inces of Szechwan, Sikang and Yünnan. The largest number is found
i Yünnan province, next in Sikang province and the Ning districts.
he question as to whether these tribes had always lived in these regions 173
r whether they had migrated from elsewhere has yet to be examined. 166
hinese and Western specialists /94/ have expressed various opinions
nd have not yet been able to arrive at an agreement. The majority
f them, however, think that the I tribes migrated from other places.
oth the Chu-shu chi-nien /The Bamboo Annals/ and the T'ung-chien
ang-mu /An outline of the Comprehensive Mirror, which is an abridged
hinese history/ maintain that Chih Yu, after his defeat in the north,
treated to the south, then further to the southwest, and lived in se-
lusion in the mountains. From him sprang the Miao and Lolo tribes
f the southwestern border area. In his study "Lu-nan hsiang-tu li-shih
-kang" /A Summary of the Local History of Lu-nan/ (in Lu-nan-hsien
iang-t'u k'ao chi-yao)/A Critical Summary of the Local History of
nan Hsien/ edited by Yang I-po and published by the Middle School
f Yünnan University, the seventh month of the twenty eighth year of
e Chinese Republic; mimeographed and not for sale) Mr. Li T'ing
aintains that the Tibetan-Burmese group of Yünnan province (an in-
rmediate tribal group, one branch of which is known as the I) probably
igrated from the northwest. Many Western researchers assert that
e Lolo came from the west (e.g., the boundary region between Tibet
nd Burma). Others think that they migrated westward from Kweichow 175
ovince. On the other hand, there is also the so-called "indigenous
eory" which says that the Lolo are natives of the southwest. This
eory is quite possible, for they need not all have migrated. In this
se the present-day Lolo of Liang-shan are no doubt the descendants

7: Clarke M-3 (no date) 1911 AE5 Miao
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564 and "White bones," but we never heard those terms used in Kweichow.

427 161 Although the Black No-su own so much of the land in north-west Kweichow and north-east of Yunnan, the No-su are not numerous. They are evidently a vanishing race, at any rate in Kweichow and around Chaotung. It is, we imagine, because of their diminishing numbers that they have taken so many of the Miao as tenants, who now greatly outnumber them.

A very interesting article on the No-su appeared in the March number of the *Chinese Recorder* for 1910, written by the Rev. C. E. Hicks of the United Methodist Mission, Chaotung, Yunnan. With Mr. Hicks's kind permission we make ample use of that article, and of a letter he has written us, in attempting to describe these people to our readers.

173 The No-su are not the original inhabitants of the Chaotung district and the adjoining parts of Kweichow. According to their own tradition, they came from Tibet, and it is worthy of note, as confirmation of this, that some of the No-su race are to be found all the way from the borders of Tibet to Chaotung. They say their ancestors were two brothers, Wu-sa and Wu-meng, who, like Esau and Jacob, struggled together in the womb of their mother; hence,

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•173 say the No-su of the present time, the wildness of our hearts and our fondness for fighting.

Coming to the Chaotung Plain, they found a people already in possession of the land, whom they called the *P'u*, and whom the Chinese to-day speak of as the *Yao-ren*. This is the same name, and the Chinese use the same character for it as for the Yao-ren about Nien Chow in Kwangtung Province, mentioned in Chapter II. Possibly they are the same tribe. As we have already explained, the word *Yao* means "dog" or "jackal." This is a term that the Chinese would naturally apply to a people they regard as much inferior to themselves, and might apply it to very different races. It seems almost impossible now to discover who the Yao-ren, who preceded the No-su around Chaotung, really were. Chinese tradition in that district says they inhabited the plain many centuries ago, when it was covered with forests, and that their houses were like huge burrows in the hill-sides. The No-su say the Yao-ren moved to Szechwan, but the Chinese say they moved to Kwangtung. It may be the Chinese say they moved to Kwangtung because they know there are people now in that province known by that
172 name. The only vestige of the Yao race now remaining are the mounds of earth which are

7: Clarke M-3 (no date) 1911 AE5 Miao
Lolo AE4

000 means "barbarian," and might be applied to any non-Chinese race. As we have mentioned in the first chapter, the Miao were once known as the Southern Man.

173 622 So much about the No-su race in general. There is much more to be said about them, but we are not able to say it. We shall now relate what we know of interest about the people of that race who are to be found around Chaotung and in the Weining district. The first No-su chieftain to arrive about Chaotung was Yen Tsang-fu. He was a very cruel tyrant, punishing offences in a most rigorous manner. It was a common practice with him to gouge out the eyes of those who disobeyed his commands, and no matter how nearly related to himself the offender might be, there was no mitigation of the punishment. These chieftains, or territorial magnates, are called *T'u-mu* by the Chinese and *T'u-si* in parts farther west. Their own designation for themselves is a term equivalent to the Chinese *Kuan yüen*, which means "magistrate" or "officer." These *T'u-mu*, or perhaps lairds would be the best term to use for them, have in many cases enriched themselves by claiming to be the owners of land occupied by weaker men, and by appropriating the estates of families which have become extinct.

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773 family was saved; but they say nothing about animals.

773 The Miao of that region say that the land was all divided among the three sons of Noah, who 173 were the ancestors of the Miao, Chinese, and No-su. The Miao are the descendants of the eldest son. Unfortunately when the land was divided, they only used straw ropes for boundaries, while the No-su used stones. A fire occurred which burnt up their boundary ropes, but left the No-su stones uninjured. Thus they lost their land!

584 In the olden times the No-su did not beg for and betroth a wife as they do now, but obtained their wives by main force. At the present time, while milder methods prevail, there are still survivals of the ancient custom. As a rule, the betrothal now takes place very early, sometimes in infancy, and at the ceremony a fowl is killed, 583 each party taking a rib of it. When the young people come to marriageable age, the final negotiations have to be concluded. These are purposely prolonged until the bridegroom, growing angry, gathers his friends and makes an attack on the maiden's home. Arming themselves with cudgels, and covering their heads and shoulders with their felt cloaks, they approach secretly and then rush towards the

[173 cont.]

131 less scattered about among the "Man" and "Méo" villages. Every-
361 where else, in the regions of Dongvan, Yen-Minh, Hoang-su-phi, Muongkhuong, Coc-leu, Baoha, Trinh-Tuong, Phongtho, the "Lolo" form merely dispersed hamlets, each consisting of only a small number of cabins.

All the "Lolo" assert that their settlement in Tonkin goes back
●173 to a very remote period, which certain of them indicate as about the beginning of the Christian era, a time when the "Lolo" formed a powerful state in eastern Yunnan, whose southern boundaries very closely approximated our present Tonkin frontier. As we have indicated in Chapter I, we have very often found in Tonkin "Lolo" in contact with the "Thai," who have not ceased dominating them and holding them in a completely subordinate position. Be that as it may, these tribes appear very long ago to have cut the ties that
[101] [177] bound them to the large groupings from which they originated, and little by little they are losing their special characteristics, while adopting the mores and beliefs of the other groups among whom they live, "Thai," "Man," or "Méo."

128 [174] We shall study more particularly in this chapter the following tribes:

The "Lolo," properly speaking.
The "Fou-la."
The "Xa-pho."
The "Ho-nhi."

101 We have already seen in Chapter II that certain tribes designated by the name of "Lolo" ("Pen-ti-lolo," "Pou-piao-lolo") had better be classed in the "Thai" group which has absorbed them and with which their dialects and their costumes connect them.

[175] The "Lolo"

101 This important tribe, by far the most numerous of the group,
131 is settled exclusively in the mountains of the region of Baolac, in direct contact with the "Méo."